

the flight of apollo

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Characters:

[Mark Sloan](#), [Derek Shepherd](#)

Additional Tags:

[Friendship](#), [Male Friendship](#), [Childhood](#), [Growing Up](#), [Milestones](#)

Language:

[English](#)

Stats:

Published: 2012-09-30 Words: 1,314 Chapters: 1/1

the flight of apollo

by [openended](#)

Summary

They're five years old and it's the first day of kindergarten. (they almost made it forty years)

Notes

Written for the [Mark Sloan Ficathon](#), prompt *Mark + Derek - Kindergarten*.

- Translation into Deutsch available: [Restricted Work] by [Schattentaenzerin](#)

They're five years old and it's the first day of kindergarten. Mark walks away from his parents with nothing more than a hug, his head held high as he follows the teacher to his spot at the third table. He sits on the small green plastic chair next to a sniffing boy who rubs at his eyes every few seconds (when they start reading, Derek's name will be the first word he recognizes).

The last of the parents finally leave and suddenly everything is scary. The teacher starts them with finger-paints. But Mark freezes, and this feeling settles over him that he can't name (later he'll understand it as *abandonment* and irrational – because his parents did come back – but right now it's the most terrifying feeling he's ever had) and now he's the one with the urge to cry.

The other boy, still sniffing, nudges him with his elbow. Mark snuffles once and then picks up the paints in front of him.

They get covered in paint within ten minutes. Even after he's had a bath that night, Mark finds green paint on his elbow while his mom is reading him a bedtime story. He smiles.

They're eleven years old and it's the beginning of soccer practice. Derek is really bad at it. Like, abysmal. Mark puts up with soccer because it gives him something to do before football starts, something that doesn't involve being in the house, but he doesn't know why Derek plays. He knows Derek hates it.

Derek's trying to play goalie and for every time he dives to catch the ball, he gets a face full of grass and mud and the ball lands in the net. He'd much rather be practicing his saxophone or reading a book, but instead he's outside in the summer heat sucking at a sport he hates.

Mark takes him aside during a Gatorade break and gives him some advice, with all the air and worldly knowledge he can muster at the wise age of eleven. He tells him to try to block the ball, not catch it, which results in Derek taking a ball to the chest not five minutes later. Derek's face lights up at finally blocking a goal, even though his chest hurts for a few days.

Before school starts that year, they make a pact in Derek's tree house with a swarm of fireflies around them and a midwest summer thunderstorm flickering on the horizon. The heat and humidity press

down on their shoulders, but they'll be best friends forever.

Derek quits soccer two days later.

They're seventeen years old and it's homecoming their senior year of high school. Mark has the perfect date – varsity cheerleading captain, he promises he was saving the best for last when she points out that he quite literally dated the entire cheerleading squad before her, including JV – and is on the homecoming court. He's ignoring the homecoming court part of it, because it requires standing up in front of people and wearing a stupid crown if he wins, but he feels on top of the world as he stands on the truck bed with the rest of his team during the parade. They're undefeated this season.

Derek has no date and, frankly, doesn't care. He's been busting his ass on college and loan applications and doesn't have time for a date, much less finding a date for one, but he enjoys the game. The marching band is surprisingly on key and together for every song and he's not even embarrassed when the director takes the microphone during halftime to recognize the band's seniors and he's required to stand on the track in his ill-fitting uniform and wave while his mom and sisters scream his name from the stands.

They share a high five and a fist bump, Derek leaning over the railing of the stands when Mark comes running out from the locker room for the second half of the game. Derek ends up going to the dance, because Mark's date's best friend's boyfriend broke up with her at the last minute and there's a dress and tickets and dinner reservations to consider, and has a miserably awkward time.

He never lets Mark set him up again, and it doesn't matter that he missed a night working on applications. They both get into their dream school, together, and Derek even gets enough financial aid that he can go.

They're twenty-one years old and it's the first day of medical school. It's terrifying like nothing they've ever experienced. Undergrad was hard, but this is impossible. Mark feels like he's behind five minutes after his first class starts. He gives up on the idea of ever getting more than four hours of sleep a night again and starts honing sleep

deprivation into a marketable skill.

Derek meets a girl on day three. It takes him two months – and Mark telling him that if he doesn't, he's actually going to pass her a note on Derek's behalf – to ask her out. Her eyes light up and though school often gets in the way of dating, they compromise and learn that it's possible to be romantic over day-old Chinese food and the endocrine system.

Mark writes his best man's toast after a few months and stuffs it in a drawer. He won't need it for years, but he knows that he'll be reading it for the two of them someday. He promises Derek not to be drunk, and holds up the deal.

They're thirty-eight years old and aren't speaking to each other. The whole thing is a giant mess and Derek's in Seattle and Mark's in New York and they're all doing their damndest not to fall apart at the seams. Nothing goes right for weeks, like when Mercury's in retrograde or the moon's especially bright and everyone just goes bonkers, except there's nothing astronomically weird to blame it on.

Mark finally gives in one night after Addison's followed Derek to Seattle. He books a flight for the next morning. He can live without Addison (it'll suck and it'll hurt and he'll probably drink a lot, but he'll live), but he's quickly learning that he cannot live without Derek.

He doesn't think he'll ever tell Derek that, though. It feels more right than words can ever make it sound.

Derek punches him in the face – and it isn't the first time – and doesn't speak to him more than he has to. But it's a step in the right direction.

They're thirty-nine years old and sitting in a hallway. Behind the door is a woman Derek loved, trying to save the woman he currently loves. Derek just needs to sit and be quiet because there isn't anything anyone will let him do, and breaking things won't make him feel any better.

Mark's not sure that Derek will ever fully forgive him for sleeping

with Addison, but that doesn't seem to matter right now. The world is passing Derek by in a flurry of gloves and results and towels, half-caught sentences when the door swings open as someone else rushes in or out.

Meredith will be okay because she has to be okay. Mark doesn't know that he can put Derek back together from a loss this big a second time; the months after Derek's father's death are months Mark prefers to forget.

He puts his hand on Derek's arm and gets a nod and a sniffle in return. It's good enough as a silent *thank you*.

He's forty-five and it's Mark's birthday. Derek pours two glasses of scotch and toasts the seat across from him. He refills his own glass twice and never touches the other glass. The ice cubes melt and dilute the alcohol, condensation drips down the side to collect in a ring on the wooden table.

"Zola played with finger-paints today," he says to the empty chair.

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